MONTHLY WELLNESS OBSERVANCES · OCTOBER 2026

October 2026: Awareness, Balance, and Growth

Mental Health, Wellness, Prevention, and Coaching Observances This Month

By Kathy L. Fortner, EdS, LPC, CCMHC, BCC | KLF-Insights | October 2026

October is one of the most important months of the year for mental health. In the span of a few weeks, communities around the world observe *Mental Illness Awareness Week, National Depression Screening Day, World Mental Health Day, and OCD Awareness Week.* It is a month that invites us to **talk openly, check in honestly, and seek support early.**

October is also a month for balance and growth. *National Work and Family Month* reminds us that our well-being at work and at home are deeply connected. *National Coaches Day and Global Leaders in Wellbeing Week* celebrate the people who help others grow, from life and executive coaches to managers who lead with care.

In more than 25 years as a counselor and coach, I've seen that prevention starts with awareness. When we understand what we're feeling, name it without shame, and reach out early, small struggles are far less likely to become crises.

Four Themes for October

1. Awareness that reduces stigma. *Mental Illness Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day* remind us that mental health conditions are common, real, and treatable. This year's World Mental Health Day theme, *"Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change,"* centers the voices of people who have lived it.

2. Checking in before a crisis. *National Depression Screening Day* encourages a simple, private check-in on your mood. Screening is not a diagnosis. It is a first step toward understanding and support.

3. Balance between work and life. *National Work and Family Month* highlights the pressures of juggling careers, caregiving, and personal well-being, and the value of workplaces and habits that support both.

4. Growth through coaching and leadership. *National Coaches Day and Global Leaders in Wellbeing Week* celebrate the coaches, mentors, and leaders who help people set goals, build confidence, and thrive.

How to Use This Page

Below you'll find October's key observances, with a simple wellness step for each, followed by why these observances matter and a list of trusted resources. Download the companion handouts for a personal mental health check-in, a work-life balance coaching worksheet, and a check-in guide for managers.

Learn, Then Take Action: Three Reads for October

October brings a lot of mental health awareness, and it can be hard to know where to begin. The three reads below explore the month's most important themes in more depth. Each one offers insight from my

counseling and coaching practice, practical ways to apply it, and a free handout to help you take the next step.

1. Checking In on Your Mental Health

Why we wait. Most of us would never ignore chest pain or a persistent fever. Yet when it comes to our emotional health, we often wait until we're exhausted, overwhelmed, or in crisis before paying attention. In more than 25 years of counseling, I've heard the same reasons again and again: "I thought it would pass." "Other people have it worse." "I didn't want to be a burden." "I didn't realize that's what it was."

These reasons are understandable, but they cost us time. Changes in mood often build slowly. A few restless nights turn into weeks of poor sleep. Feeling a little flat becomes losing interest in the things that used to bring joy. Because the change is gradual, it's easy to adjust to it without noticing how much has shifted.

What October offers. *Mental Illness Awareness Week (October 4–10),* observed during the first full week of October since 1990, and *National Depression Screening Day (October 8)* were created to interrupt that pattern. Their message is simple: **checking in on your mental health is a normal, healthy part of taking care of yourself**, not a sign that something is wrong with you.

What a check-in really is. A mental health check-in is a short, honest look at how you've been doing over the past couple of weeks: your mood, sleep, energy, stress, appetite, focus, and connection with others. A formal screening, like the free tools at mhascreening.org, uses a brief set of questions to help you understand whether talking with a professional might help. A screening is not a diagnosis. Think of it as a mirror, not a verdict.

A counselor's insight: look for patterns, not perfect days. Everyone has hard days. What matters is the pattern over time. When I work with clients, we often track a few areas each week. Many people are surprised by what they see: their mood dips when sleep slips, stress rises during certain months at work, or connection with friends is the first thing they give up when life gets busy. Once you can see your patterns, you can start to change them.

Signs it's time to reach out. Consider talking with your doctor, a counselor, or your **Employee Assistance Program** if, for two weeks or more, you notice:

- *Sadness, emptiness, or hopelessness most days*
- *Losing interest in things you usually enjoy*
- *Changes in sleep or appetite that affect your daily life*
- *Constant worry, irritability, or feeling on edge*
- *Pulling away from people you care about*
- *Relying on alcohol or other substances to cope*

The bottom line. Reaching out early is not overreacting. It's prevention. The earlier we notice and respond, the more options we have, and the easier the path forward tends to be.

> **Put it into practice:** Download the **Handout My Mental Health Check-In.** Each week, take two minutes to rate ten areas of your well-being from 1 to 5, note what helped and what made things harder, and choose one small step for the week ahead. After a few weeks, look back for patterns.

- **Free anonymous screening:** Mental Health America, **mhascreening.org**
- **Learn more: NAMI Mental Illness Awareness Week, nami.org**
- **Support: NAMI HelpLine,** 1-800-950-6264 · S**AMHSA National Helpline,** 1-800-662-4357
- **In crisis:** Call or text 988

2. Finding Balance Between Work and Home

The myth of perfect balance. Many people picture work-life balance as a scale with work on one side and life on the other, perfectly level. Real life rarely works that way. Some seasons demand more at work: a launch, a promotion, a busy quarter. Other seasons demand more at home: a new baby, a move, an aging parent, an illness. Trying to keep everything perfectly even can become one more source of stress.

What balance really means. *National Work and Family Month*, established by the U.S. Senate in 2003, invites us to think about balance differently. In coaching, I describe healthy balance as **alignment**: your time and energy reflect what matters most to you in this season of life, and you have enough rest to recover from what life asks of you. Balance isn't a fixed destination. It's something we adjust, again and again.

Why it matters for mental health. Work and home are not separate compartments. Stress from a difficult meeting comes home with us to the dinner table. Worry about a child or a parent follows us into work. When demands stay high and recovery stays low for too long, the result is often burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and a feeling that nothing we do is ever enough. Burnout affects sleep, health, relationships, and performance, and it's far easier to prevent than to recover from.

Early warning signs. Balance usually slips quietly. Watch for:

- *Feeling tired even after a weekend or a vacation*
- *Snapping at the people you love most*
- *Checking work messages during dinner, at bedtime, or on days off*
- *No longer having time for the things that restore you*
- *Feeling detached from work you once cared about*

A coach's insight: start with one boundary. When clients come to me feeling stretched thin, they often want to change everything at once. That rarely lasts. Instead, we start with an honest inventory of their life areas, clarify their top priorities, and choose **one clear boundary**, such as a protected family dinner, a real lunch break, or no work email after a certain hour. Then we test small changes for a week and review what worked. Small, consistent shifts build confidence and momentum. Over time, they add up to real change.

Ask for what you need. Many workplaces offer more support than people realize, including flexible schedules, leave options, Employee Assistance Programs, and accommodations. You won't know what's possible until you ask.

> **Put it into practice:** Download **Handout: Work-Life Balance Coaching Worksheet.** Rate eight areas of your life, name your top priorities and biggest energy drains, set one boundary, and plan a one-week experiment with a small action at work, at home, and for yourself.

- **Workplace support:** Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP); ask your HR department

- **Workplace accommodations:** Job Accommodation Network, askjan.org
- **About professional coaching:** International Coaching Federation, coachingfederation.org
- **Personal and executive coaching:** KLF-Insights, [insert contact link]

3. Supporting Others: Leaders, Friends, and Real Voices

Why listening changes everything. The *2026 World Mental Health Day* theme (October 10) is *"Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change."* It reflects something I've witnessed many times: stigma begins to fade when people feel safe enough to share their experiences, and when others listen without judgment. When a coworker mentions managing anxiety, or a friend talks openly about depression, mental health stops being an abstract topic. It becomes human, and it gives others permission to seek help too.

Clearing up common misunderstandings. October also brings O*CD Awareness Week (October 11–17)* and *ADHD Awareness Month,* two conditions that are often misunderstood.

- **OCD is not about being neat.** It involves unwanted, distressing thoughts and repetitive behaviors or mental rituals that a person feels driven to do. It can take hours out of someone's day. The 2026 theme, *"That's OCD,"* highlights how many different forms it can take.
- **ADHD is not just a childhood condition, and it's not a lack of effort.** It often continues into adulthood, and many adults are diagnosed later in life. With understanding and support, people with ADHD can thrive.

Casual comments like "I'm so OCD" or "I'm so ADD today" may seem harmless, but they can make it harder for people who are truly struggling to be taken seriously.

The special role of leaders. G*lobal Leaders in Wellbeing Week (October 19–23)* highlights how much managers shape a team's daily experience. A leader's tone, expectations, and responses influence stress, trust, and whether people feel safe asking for help. In my executive coaching work, I often remind leaders that they don't need to be counselors. They need to be **attentive, caring, and connected to resources.**

How to support someone, at work or at home. The same skills help with a team member, a friend, a partner, or an adult child:

1. **Notice.** Changes in mood, energy, engagement, or behavior are worth paying attention to.
2. **Check in privately.** "I've noticed you seem a bit different lately. How are you doing, really?"
3. **Listen without fixing.** Let them talk. Thank them for trusting you.
4. **Avoid minimizing.** Skip "Everyone's stressed" or "Just think positive."
5. **Share resources.** An EAP, a counselor, a support line, or flexible options can make help feel within reach.
6. **Follow up.** A second conversation a few days later shows you meant it.

A counselor's insight: you don't need perfect words. Many people avoid these conversations because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. In my experience, what people remember is not the exact words. It's that someone noticed, asked, and stayed.

> **Put it into practice:** Download **Handout: Leading With Well-Being.** It includes check-in questions about well-being, workload, support, and growth; signs someone may be struggling; and a simple "do and avoid" guide for caring conversations. It's written for leaders but works just as well for family and friends.

- **World Mental Health Day: World Federation for Mental Health, wmhdofficial.com**
- **OCD information and support:** International OCD Foundation, iocdf.org/programs/ocdweek
- **ADHD information and support: adhdawarenessmonth.org · CHADD, chadd.org**
- **If someone is in crisis:** Stay with them, and call or text 988 together. In immediate danger, call 911.

Month-Long Observances: All of October

Observance	What it highlights	One wellness step you can take
National Depression Education and Awareness Month	Increases understanding of depression, its signs, and effective treatment.	Learn the signs of depression, and check in with yourself honestly.
ADHD Awareness Month	Shares reliable information about ADHD across the lifespan. 2026 theme: "A Community of Support."	Learn how ADHD can look different in adults, and offer patience and practical support.
National Work and Family Month	Highlights the importance of balancing work responsibilities with personal and family life.	Set one boundary that protects family or personal time each week.
National Bullying Prevention Month	Promotes kindness, acceptance, and inclusion in schools, online, and at work.	Talk with children and teens about what to do if they see or experience bullying.
Domestic Violence Awareness Month	Raises awareness of domestic violence and supports survivors.	Learn the warning signs, and know where to find confidential help.
Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month	Honors families who have experienced miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss.	Acknowledge a loss gently. Saying "I'm so sorry, and I remember" can mean a great deal.
National Substance Abuse Prevention Month	Promotes prevention and healthy choices, culminating in Red Ribbon Week.	Start an honest, judgment-free conversation with your family about alcohol and drugs.
Breast Cancer Awareness Month	Promotes early detection, screening, and support.	Schedule recommended screenings, and remember that a diagnosis affects emotional health too.
National Disability Employment Awareness Month	Celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities, including mental health disabilities.	Learn about workplace accommodations and inclusive practices.

Weeks and Days to Know

Date	Observance	Why it matters
Oct 4–10	Mental Illness Awareness Week (NAMI)	Held during the first full week of October since 1990 to raise awareness, fight stigma, and promote support.
Mon, Oct 5	World Day of Bullying Prevention	An early-October call to stand up for kindness and inclusion.
Tue, Oct 6	National Coaches Day	Celebrates coaches of every kind, from youth sports to life and executive coaches, who help others grow.
Thu, Oct 8	National Depression Screening Day	Encourages free, anonymous mental health screenings and early conversations about mood.
Sat, Oct 10	World Mental Health Day	2026 global theme: "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change."
Oct 11–17	OCD Awareness Week	2026 theme: "That's OCD," highlighting the many ways OCD can show up.
Thu, Oct 15	Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day	At 7:00 p.m. local time, families light candles for the International Wave of Light.
Fri, Oct 16	Boss's Day	A chance to recognize leaders who support their teams' growth and well-being.
Oct 19–23	Global Leaders in Wellbeing Week	Focuses on the role leaders play in shaping the well-being of the people they manage.
Wed, Oct 21	Unity Day (PACER)	Wear and share orange to send a message of kindness, acceptance, and inclusion.
Thu, Oct 22	Purple Thursday	Wear purple to show support for survivors during Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Date	Observance	Why it matters
Oct 23–31	Red Ribbon Week	The nation's oldest drug-misuse prevention campaign. 2026 theme: "Make a Difference. Be a Hero. Stay Drug Free."

Official Observance Links: Mental Health in October

Learn more, find events, or download toolkits from the organizations that lead each observance.

Observance	2026 dates	Official link
Mental Illness Awareness Week (NAMI)	Oct 4–10	nami.org/get-involved/awareness-events/mental-illness-awareness-week
National Depression Screening Day	Thu, Oct 8	Free anonymous screening: mhascreening.org
World Mental Health Day (World Federation for Mental Health)	Sat, Oct 10	wmhdofficial.com
OCD Awareness Week (International OCD Foundation)	Oct 11–17	iocdf.org/programs/ocdweek
ADHD Awareness Month	All of October	adhdawarenessmonth.org; chadd.org
Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day and Wave of Light	Thu, Oct 15, 7:00 p.m.	nationalshare.org
National Bullying Prevention Month and Unity Day (PACER)	All of October; Unity Day Wed, Oct 21	pacer.org/bullying; pacer.org/unityday
Domestic Violence Awareness Month	All of October; Purple Thursday Oct 22	thehotline.org
Red Ribbon Week (DEA and National Family Partnership)	Oct 23–31	dea.gov/redribbon

Why These Observances Matter

October's observances can look like a crowded calendar. But together they tell a single story: **mental health is health, and prevention works best when we act early and together.**

Because silence keeps people from getting help

Many people live with symptoms for years before reaching out, often because of stigma, shame, or not recognizing what they're experiencing. *Mental Illness Awareness Week* has been observed during the first full week of October since 1990, and *World Mental Health Day* has been observed every October 10 since 1992. Both exist to replace silence with understanding. This year's *World Mental Health Day* theme asks us to listen to people with lived experience, because their voices change minds and systems.

Because early checks make a difference

National Depression Screening Day was created so people could check in on their mental health privately, easily, and without cost. A screening isn't a diagnosis. It's a way to notice patterns early, while support can make the biggest difference.

Because many conditions are misunderstood

OCD is often joked about as being "neat," and ADHD is often mistaken for a childhood issue only. Awareness weeks for both conditions correct these myths and help people recognize symptoms in themselves and others. The 2026 OCD Awareness Week theme, "That's OCD," highlights how varied the condition can be.

Because work and life are not separate

The U.S. Senate established National Work and Family Month in 2003 to encourage healthier, more flexible work environments. Work stress follows us home, and family stress follows us to work. Balance isn't a luxury. It is protective for our mental health, our relationships, and our performance.

Because leaders and coaches shape well-being

Managers often have as much influence on an employee's daily stress as anyone in their life. Global Leaders in Wellbeing Week and Boss's Day highlight how leaders can create psychologically safe teams. National Coaches Day celebrates the coaches, mentors, and guides who help people set goals, build skills, and believe in themselves.

Because safety and kindness are prevention

Bullying, domestic violence, and substance misuse all leave lasting effects on mental health. Unity Day, Purple Thursday, and Red Ribbon Week make prevention visible: a color, a ribbon, a conversation. Each is a reminder that everyone can play a role in keeping others safe.

Because some losses are carried quietly

Pregnancy and infant loss is often grieved in silence. Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month, first proclaimed in 1988, and the Wave of Light on October 15 give families permission to grieve openly and to know they are not alone.

> **The common thread:** October asks each of us: *How am I really doing, and who around me might need a check-in?*

Spotlight: Counseling and Coaching, What's the Difference?

National Coaches Day is a good time to clarify two kinds of support that work well together:

- ***Counseling*** *focuses on emotional health: understanding and healing from stress, anxiety, depression, grief, trauma, and relationship challenges.*
- ***Life coaching*** *focuses on the future: clarifying goals, building habits, increasing confidence, and creating action plans.*
- ***Executive coaching*** *focuses on leadership: communication, decision-making, team well-being, and professional growth.*

Many people benefit from one or both at different times in their lives. Not sure which fits you? A brief consultation can help you decide.

Trusted Resources

The organizations below offer free information and support. Save this list, or share it with someone who might need it.

Immediate Help: Available 24/7

Resource	How it helps	Contact
988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline	Free, confidential support for anyone in emotional distress or suicidal crisis.	Call or text 988; chat at 988lifeline.org
Veterans Crisis Line	Confidential crisis support for veterans, service members, and their families.	Dial 988, then press 1
Crisis Text Line	Text-based crisis support with a trained volunteer.	Text HOME to 741741
National Domestic Violence Hotline	Confidential support, safety planning, and referrals for anyone affected by abuse.	1-800-799-7233 (SAFE); text START to 88788; thehotline.org
Emergency services	For immediate danger or a medical emergency.	Call 911

Mental Health Information and Support

Resource	How it helps	Contact
NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)	Education, support groups, and the NAMI HelpLine for individuals and families.	1-800-950-6264; nami.org
Mental Health America: Online Screening	Free, anonymous mental health screening tools.	mhascreening.org
SAMHSA National Helpline	Treatment referrals and information for mental health and substance use concerns.	1-800-662-4357 (HELP); samhsa.gov
International OCD Foundation	Information about OCD, treatment, and finding a specialist.	iocdf.org
CHADD	Information and support for children and adults with ADHD and their families.	chadd.org

Prevention, Safety, and Loss

Resource	How it helps	Contact
PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center	Bullying prevention resources for students, parents, and educators.	pacer.org/bullying
StopBullying.gov	Federal information on preventing and responding to bullying.	stopbullying.gov
DEA Red Ribbon Campaign / Get Smart About Drugs	Drug-misuse prevention information for families and communities.	dea.gov/redribbon; getsmartaboutdrugs.com
Share Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support	Support for families after pregnancy or infant loss.	nationalshare.org

Work, Balance, and Growth

Resource	How it helps	Contact
Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	Many employers offer free, confidential counseling and work-life resources.	Ask your HR department

Resource	How it helps	Contact
Job Accommodation Network (JAN)	Free guidance on workplace accommodations, including for mental health conditions.	askjan.org
International Coaching Federation (ICF)	Information about professional coaching and credentialed coaches.	coachingfederation.org
KLF-Insights	Online counseling, life coaching, and executive coaching for individuals, couples, and organizations.	[insert contact link]

Free October Handouts

- **Handout-My Mental Health Check-In.** A private weekly self-check on mood, sleep, stress, and connection, with signs it's time to reach out.
- **Handout-Work-Life Balance Coaching Worksheet.** Rate your balance, clarify priorities, and plan one week of small changes.
- **Handout-Leading With Well-Being.** A practical check-in guide for managers and team leaders.

Also on the KLF-Insights site: our November and December Wellness Calendars, the four-part Holiday Wellness Series (starting November, 2026-December, 2026, *Connected, Not Just Together*, and the continued December Wellness Series.

About the Author

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This page is for educational and wellness purposes and is not a substitute for individual counseling, medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Observance dates are set by their sponsoring organizations. Listing an organization is not an endorsement; phone numbers and websites may change, so please confirm before sharing.